What is need-to-know?

Need-to-know is the determination by an authorized holder of information that a prospective recipient requires access to specific information in order to perform or assist in a lawful and authorized governmental function.

Need-To-Know is YOUR Responsibility!

You, as an authorized holder of classified or sensitive information, are required to determine an individual's need-to-know before you grant that individual access to any classified or sensitive information within your control. It is your responsibility to confirm in your mind that he or she truly needs the information to perform his or her job.

You share the requirement to protect sensitive and classified information with every other individual in the organization. Your personal responsibilities include using all the security tools available to you, such as secure phones, secure faxes, safes, and badges, and learning the security skills you need to succeed in the National Security environment. One of these skills is the ability to determine need-to-know.

Need-to-know is one of the most difficult security principles to apply. Failure to apply this principle has resulted in some of the most damaging espionage cases in recent history. Statistically, the FBI reports that 80% of espionage is committed by "insiders."

Most of these insiders who committed espionage were fully cleared individuals, some with access to special program information. In almost every case, these insiders gained access to information not pertinent to their jobs by circumventing the need-to-know principle. They were able to do so because their co-workers failed to properly control access to classified and sensitive information under their control.

> **Remember, you must determine that an individual has the appropriate security clearance <u>and</u> a valid need-to-know before releasing any classified information to them.**

Two espionage cases which dramatically illustrate the breakdown of the principle are the cases of Jonathan J. Pollard and Aldrich Ames.

Pollard, a Naval Investigative Service counterterrorism analyst with responsibility for the United States and Caribbean basin, was able to easily obtain documents on virtually any subject related to the Middle East and Far East from various intelligence agencies, even though he did not have a valid need-to-know for that information.

Aldrich Ames was a CIA operations officer, who, when arrested in 1994, had in his possession over a hundred documents related to intelligence operations in the former Soviet Union for which he did not have a need-to-know.

In the conduct of your daily duties, you may run into situations which make you question whether an individual has a need-to-know for certain information you have in your possession.

For example, you may be involved in a very sensitive special project or operation. An individual from the office next door inquires about the project. After determining that she has the appropriate security clearance for the information, do you grant her access immediately? **NO!**

You must determine if she has a valid need-to-know for the information. Does she require the information to perform her official duties? If the answer is "no," then you cannot release the information to her, as she does not have a valid need-to-know for the information.

If you cannot determine whether the individual has a valid need-to-know, then seek guidance from your supervisor. Determination of need-to-know is the personal responsibility of everyone. However, if there is any doubt in your mind as to an individual's need-to-know, always ask your supervisor before granting access to any classified or sensitive information.

Need-to-know is one of the most fundamental security principles. The practice of need-to-know limits the damage that can be done by a trusted insider who goes bad.

Failures in implementing the need-to-know principle have contributed greatly to the damage caused by a number of recent espionage cases.

NTK
need-to-know

Need-To-Know

Understanding Your
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